

Challenges and Strategies For the Future

Wildlife resource users, whether hunters, trappers, birders, photographers, or other outdoor enthusiasts, share a common desire to see wildlife managed to ensure their long-term health and well-being and to provide a variety of opportunities for human use and enjoyment. Our collective challenge, and opportunity, is to identify specific issues that we expect to face in accomplishing this goal. Through staff and public discussions and input, we have identified the following issues, along with possible strategies for addressing them. While these issues are presented separately in an effort to more easily understand and address them, we recognize that many issues and strategies are interrelated, and will undoubtedly change over time as new information and circumstances develop. They will therefore require on-going review and attention, especially as we develop and implement more detailed operational plans that link these strategies to budget allocations.

Wildlife Management and Research

Historically, the division has maintained strong and highly productive management and research programs for game species, which, for the most part, have been enabled by federal Pittman-Robertson and state Fish and Game funds. Tied to these programs are public opportunities to hunt, trap, view, or otherwise use and enjoy these species. This section includes issues related to big game, small game, furbearers, marine mammals, and land uses.



Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Issue #1—Wildlife Management and Research:

Maintaining information-based big game management and research activities will become increasingly difficult as operating costs continue to rise.

Direction

Pursue opportunities to obtain additional funds or partnerships for big game management and research efforts.

Strategies

- Work with interested users and organizations to identify sources of additional funds.
- Develop proposals for partnering with organizations, foundations, and other entities to collect biological information on big game populations.

Issue #2—Wildlife Management and Research:

Despite their social, recreational, and biological importance, little information is collected about Alaska's small game populations or their levels of harvest.

Direction

Retain the division's small game management program, and expand the collection of harvest, population, and other biological information.

Strategies

- Cooperate with the public and other wildlife agencies and organizations to identify and work with small game species and populations with the greatest management and conservation concerns.
- Expand data collecting methods to obtain additional information about select small game species.

Issue #3—Wildlife Management and Research:

Despite their economic, subsistence, recreational, and biological value, limited effort is spent monitoring Alaska's furbearer populations.

Direction

Expand the division's furbearer management program, including the collection of harvest, population, and other biological information.

Strategies

- Cooperate with trappers and other wildlife agencies and organizations to identify and target furbearer species and populations with the greatest management and conservation concerns.
- Expand data collecting methods to obtain additional information about select furbearer species.

Issue #4—Wildlife Management and Research:

Severe population declines of several species of marine mammals (e.g., Steller sea lions and harbor seals) have occurred, and minimal information exists about the basic life histories and biology of several marine mammals, including ribbon, ringed, spotted, and bearded seals.

Direction

Acquire the information needed for effective management strategies that would result in population recovery of depressed populations and increase knowledge about the biology and ecology of marine mammals.



Photo courtesy of Aaron Christ

Biologists collect data from a captured juvenile Steller sea lion before releasing it back into the wild. These data will assist in determining why Alaska Steller sea lion populations have declined and are now listed as Threatened and Endangered.

Strategies

- Conduct scientific research to determine the possible causes of population declines.
- Work with federal agencies and Native organizations and commissions to identify informational gaps and needs, and cooperate on joint research efforts.
- Conduct research to increase understanding of population abundance and trends; survival and reproduction rates; dispersal, diet, and foraging ecology; and habitat use of marine mammals.
- Identify and support management actions that aid in species recovery.

Issue #5—Wildlife Management and Research:

Land development, recreational uses, and other human activities can negatively affect wildlife and their habitats, while in other instances, altering habitats can increase their value and utility for wildlife.

Direction

Gather and disseminate information about impacts of land use practices on wildlife, including mining, logging, oil development, road and trail construction, land subdivision, and off-road recreational vehicles, while developing and implementing techniques for altering habitats to benefit wildlife.

Strategies

- Collect biological information necessary to evaluate land development activities.
- Present biological information to decision makers so they can make informed decisions.
- Provide options for development activities that will minimize or mitigate negative impacts on wildlife populations.
- Cooperate with enforcement agencies and the department's Habitat and Restoration Division to enforce land use regulations and manage public use on state wildlife refuges, critical habitat areas and sanctuaries, and other public lands.
- Actively manage refuges, critical habitat areas, and sanctuaries to allow for continued public use and protection of fish and wildlife and their habitats.
- Expand efforts to restore and enhance wildlife habitats to increase abundance and diversity of wildlife populations.



Photo courtesy of Ward Testa

Small aircraft are used to locate individual radiocollared animals, to census whole populations to determine their status and trend, and to transport biologists and supplies into remote field camp locations.

Issue #6—Wildlife Management and Research:

Some of Alaska's lands in private ownership are important for wildlife. These lands may be less productive for wildlife than they could be, and may be closed to recreational uses, including hunting, unless cooperative agreements are developed with land owners that make it financially attractive and culturally appropriate to establish partnerships and agreements.

Direction

Identify opportunities to partner with private landowners.

Strategies

- Work with Native and other private landowners to help develop wildlife and land-use management plans that increase the value of those lands for wildlife, and that enable recreational uses on those lands.
- Pursue federal grant opportunities with private landowners to help fund habitat enhancement activities on private lands.

Issue #7—Wildlife Management and Research:

Wildlife regularly crosses jurisdictional boundaries, and the majority of land in Alaska is in federal ownership. Lack of coordination and cooperation among managing resource agencies can be counter-productive to wildlife populations, as well as to users who desire to enjoy those lands.

Direction

Cooperate with federal agencies on wildlife and other land-use activities on federal lands.

Strategies

- As appropriate, partner with federal agencies on wildlife, habitat, and other land-use management and research projects and activities.
- Continue to provide input on management plans and strategies affecting federal lands.
- Work with federal agencies to ensure continued public access.

Nongame Management and Research

Recognizing the overlapping nature of many wildlife-related recreational pursuits, and the value of healthy ecosystems to a diversity of species and to the users who enjoy them, the division intends to broaden its management and research efforts to more directly include nongame species. This effort, made possible through new State Wildlife Grants funding, will include collecting biological information to help identify critical needs of species and their habitats. To ensure the well-being of species and to minimize the possibility of having species listed as threatened or endangered, our goals are to:

- 1) increase public ownership and support of nongame efforts through broad public involvement;
- 2) establish a stable source of funding;
- 3) provide for a wide range of public uses of nongame wildlife, as long as those uses are not detrimental to wildlife populations or their habitats;
- 4) collaborate with other agencies and organizations to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of nongame research and management activities;
- 5) gather basic inventory, monitoring and life history data needed for early detection of declines; and
- 6) protect wildlife populations and their habitats from significant losses in abundance and distribution due to development and other human activities.

Issue #1—Nongame Management and Research:

Baseline information is inadequate for the majority of Alaska's nongame species and their habitats.

Direction

Gather basic inventory, monitoring, and life history data needed for the management of nongame populations and their ecological communities, and participate in coordinated regional and national conservation programs.

Strategies

- Develop inventory and monitoring programs for nongame species.
- Use existing National and Regional conservation plans to help identify key species and habitats for initial study, and those that need further investigation.



Photo courtesy of Jim Davis

The olive-sided flycatcher nests in Alaska in summer, and migrates to South America for the winter.

Issue #2—Nongame Management and Research:

Many agencies, organizations, and individuals are involved in various projects relating to nongame management and research. Without coordination and active public participation, there is the potential for overlooking critical needs or duplicating efforts.

Direction

Coordinate and collaborate with other divisions, agencies, organizations, and interested individuals to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of nongame research and management on a variety of species and issues.

Strategies

- Participate in existing conservation efforts, such as Partners in Flight (neotropical migrants), the North American Bat Conservation Partnership, and waterfowl, shorebird, and waterbird programs.
- Identify processes for sharing nongame data and other information between partners.
- Coordinate expertise by partnering and collaborating on grants, and graduate student involvement.
- Encourage and promote volunteer participation in programs such as Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, atlases, feeder counts, urban migration banding stations, and "citizen science" programs.

Issue #3—Nongame Management and Research:

Federal funds for nongame programs must be matched by state or private funds and the division currently has limited funds with which to match available federal funds.

Direction

Establish diverse and reliable sources of matching funding.

Strategies

- Work with the public, other agencies, and organizations to identify and secure matching funds.
- Pursue funding partnerships and user fees wherever possible.
- Develop agency expertise to pursue and acquire existing available grants and other funding opportunities.



Photo courtesy of Herman Griesse

Hunting in Alaska is enjoyed by young and old alike.

Wildlife Uses

The division recognizes the need for and value in providing a variety of cultural and other wildlife uses for Alaskans and visitors to the state. Hunting, trapping, viewing, and wildlife-related education are among the pursuits recognized by the division and the public, with further recognition that these pursuits can be compatible. This section of the plan addresses specific issues related to each of these pursuits, along with directions and strategies for ensuring their continued viability.

Hunting and Trapping

Hunting and trapping are long-standing pursuits enjoyed by many Alaskans and nonresidents alike, and providing these opportunities is part of the division's mission. Sales of hunting and trapping licenses, along with big game harvest tags, provide the bulk of the money for the state's Fish and Game Fund. The division will continue to promote and support hunting and trapping activities, within sustained yield guidelines.

Issue # 1—Hunting and Trapping:

An increase in the numbers of hunters in locally popular locations has created hunter crowding, along with ill will among local residents, and can compromise hunter success and hunt quality for local and visiting hunters alike.

Direction

Look for ways to reduce and minimize hunter crowding and intrusion into areas where conflicts with local users are most likely to occur, and pursue ways to accommodate quality hunting opportunities.

Strategies

- Work with hunters, transporters, guides, and other affected or interested parties to identify areas where overcrowding and user conflicts may occur.
- Work with hunters and other interested and affected parties to identify and develop additional hunting opportunities.

Issue # 2—Hunting and Trapping:

Availability of and access to public information about hunting and trapping in Alaska can be improved.

Direction

Increase the availability of and access to information about hunting and trapping in Alaska.

Strategies

- Work with hunters and trappers to further identify specific informational needs and desires.
- Enhance the division's web site with hunting and trapping information and materials.
- Improve access to electronic licensing and other electronic hunter and trapper services.
- Work with the tourism industry to develop web links between their sites and the division's web site.



Photo courtesy of Patrick Valkenburg

Wildlife Viewing

Most of the 1.2 million visitors who come to Alaska each year say that one of their primary interests is enjoying Alaska's natural beauty and abundant wildlife. Many Alaska residents live in Alaska because of its wildlife resources, and most Alaskans enjoy observing all types of wildlife, either solely or in conjunction with other outdoor pursuits. Our goals are to develop a wildlife watching program that:

- 1) assists the public in viewing wildlife throughout the state,
- 2) provides safe opportunities for people to view wildlife,
- 3) promotes ethical standards for viewing wildlife, and
- 4) seeks to avoid or minimize impacts on other users.

Issue #3—Hunting and Trapping:

Trapping is coming under increased public scrutiny, and controversy about trapping as an appropriate use of wildlife has increased.

Direction

Provide educational information to the public regarding furbearer biology and management, and human harvest of furbearers.

Strategies

- Collect and use biological data on furbearer population status, trends, and harvests to ensure that trapping does not exceed sustainable levels.
- Make information available to the public regarding the legitimacy and biological sustainability of harvesting furbearers.
- Work with Alaska's trappers and other wildlife interests to establish most appropriate and humane guidelines for trapping.
- Identify potential conflicts that may arise between trappers and the general public, and develop methods for addressing and resolving them.

Issue #1—Wildlife Viewing:

Visitors to Alaska and residents of the state want to know more about how and where to view wildlife.

Direction

Provide high-quality information about wildlife viewing in a variety of formats.

Strategies

- Host wildlife viewing clinics to teach people wildlife viewing skills, including responsible viewing behavior.
- Publish a series of regional or local viewing guides.
- Enhance division web pages with new information about viewing opportunities and tips.
- Work with media outlets in Alaska to disseminate information about viewing opportunities.
- Work with the visitor industry to ensure that accurate information is provided to the public.
- Develop interpretative panels and signs along Alaska's highways, in concert with the Alaska Department of Transportation.

Issue #2—Wildlife Viewing:

Many established wildlife viewing areas are at capacity during the peak summer season.

Direction

Develop new and enhance existing viewing sites.

Strategies

- Work with local communities, private landowners, and other public agencies to identify potential new sites.
- Seek to avoid or minimize impacts on other users, including hunters, trappers, anglers, and adjacent landowners.
- Ensure that viewing programs do not adversely affect wildlife populations or habitats.
- Incorporate educational components in viewing programs wherever possible.

Issue #3—Wildlife Viewing:

Wildlife viewing can cause disturbances and stress for wildlife populations and their habitats if not properly conducted or managed.

Direction

Develop and distribute information on safe and responsible wildlife viewing behavior.

Strategies

- Work with the tourism industry to establish and publish wildlife viewing guidelines.
- Provide tips regarding responsible viewing behavior to the public through written and electronic media.
- As funding permits, monitor new “informal” viewing sites to minimize impacts on wildlife, habitat, and other wildlife users.

Issue #4—Wildlife Viewing

Federal funds for wildlife viewing programs must be matched by state or private funds and the division currently has limited funds with which to match available federal funds.

Direction

Establish diverse and reliable sources of matching funding.

Strategies

- Work with the public, other agencies, organizations, and foundations to identify and secure matching funds.
- Pursue funding partnerships and user fees wherever possible.
- Develop agency expertise to take advantage of existing grants and other funding opportunities.



Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Visitors to Walrus Islands State Game Sanctuary in the summer are rewarded with excellent views of walrus resting on beaches. These areas, known as walrus "haulouts," are important terrestrial habitat for walrus.

Education

Surveys show that Alaskans care about wildlife, and they want science-based information to formulate reasonable conclusions and opinions on conservation issues. The public is also interested in activities of the division, and how those relate to the conservation of Alaska's wildlife. To address these interests, the division will strive to develop and deliver a variety of educational programs to promote public use and enjoyment of wildlife and participation in wildlife conservation. Our goal is to have an Alaskan public that:

- 1) values wildlife;
- 2) interacts with wildlife safely and ethically;
- 3) understands the activities and functions of the Division of Wildlife Conservation;
- 4) has the best possible wildlife information available for addressing public policy; and
- 5) understands and respects the interests and needs of a broad diversity of wildlife users.

Issue—Education:

Many Alaskans wish to know and understand more about wildlife species and how they are managed.

Direction

Increase opportunities for people to gain knowledge and understanding of the relationship between wildlife, their habitats, and people.

Strategies

- Develop and provide community-based education programs and activities, including, but not limited to, publications, media, interpretive and informational presentations, and special events.
- Develop and provide educational programs to students through the integration of wildlife-related information, materials, and training, including Project WILD, the Alaska Wildlife Curriculum, and other programs, into school curricula.
- Cooperate with other agencies and organizations to offer educational information and materials.
- Provide educational opportunities for the public to gain an understanding of complex ecological relationships and wildlife management issues.
- Develop and offer outdoor skill development clinics, training, and activities, including hunter and trapper education, bear safety, and other topics.
- Provide the public with timely, unbiased information regarding ballot initiatives related to wildlife management issues.



Photo courtesy of Roger Seavoy

A division biologist shows an orphaned muskox calf to Bethel school children before sending it to a new home at a zoo.

Public Service

Providing service to the public is one of the fundamental functions of the division. Service varies from providing information to hunters and wildlife watchers to dealing with human-wildlife conflicts. The foundation of public service is effective communication and a commitment to excellence. Communication between the division and the public is essential to fostering mutual understanding of issues; from remote, rural areas to urban centers.

The division is committed to achieving the highest level of public satisfaction across regions by demonstrating consistent professional and courteous behavior toward the public and providing people with professional and knowledgeable services.

Issue #1—Public Service:

There is increasing demand for fast and easy access to information from the division on a wide variety of wildlife-related subjects.

Direction

Improve our ability to provide accurate, timely, comprehensive, and concise information to the public in a manner that achieves a high level of customer satisfaction.